DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 552 PS 028 713

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TITLE Improving Social Skills through Cooperative Learning and Other Instructional Strategies.
PUB DATE 2000-05-00
NOTE 43p.; Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Field-Based Masters Program.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Behavior Change; *Change Strategies; Classroom Research; Cooperative Learning; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *Interpersonal Competence; Intervention; *Prosocial Behavior; *Skill Development; Social Development; *Student Behavior; Student Improvement
IDENTIFIERS Social Skills Training

ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to improve social skills in targeted elementary students. The problem of poor social skills was documented by means of data revealing the number of students exhibiting inappropriate behaviors. Students exhibited a lack of social skills through: inappropriate manners, lack of cooperation, not occupying one's own space, putting down others, interrupting instruction, and inattentiveness. Two major categories of intervention were implemented: direct instruction of selected social skills and cooperative learning strategies. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in student use of all targeted social skills. The intervention of implementing prosocial activities including cooperative learning and direct instruction seemed to have had a positive effect on student behavior. (Four appendices include student survey forms and teacher rating scale and observation checklist. Contains 28 references.) (Author/EV)

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IMPROVING SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & SkyLight
Field-Based Masters Program
Chicago, Illinois

May, 2000

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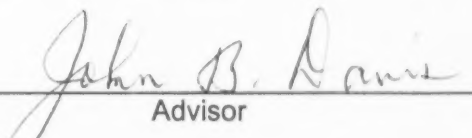

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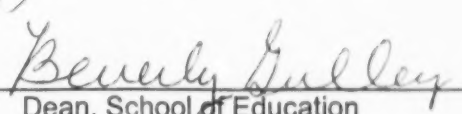

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May, 2000

ABSTRACT

This action research project describes the issue of poor social skills and the effect on inappropriate classroom behaviors. The targeted population consisted of elementary education students in two growing, middle-class communities located in a suburb of a large, metropolitan area. The problem of poor social skills was documented through data revealing the number of students exhibiting inappropriate behaviors.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of social skills in the areas of: inappropriate manner usage, lack of cooperation, not occupying own space, putting down others, interrupting instruction and inattentiveness. This lack of social skills can be attributed to an increased exposure to negative influences, a lack of positive role models and poor parenting.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of two major categories of intervention: direct instruction of targeted social skills and cooperative learning strategies.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of all targeted social skills. The intervention of pro-social activities including cooperative learning and direct instruction appear to have had a positive effect on student behavior.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

Students of the targeted early childhood special education, first, and fourth grade classes exhibited inappropriate behaviors and lacked appropriate social skills as evidenced by teacher observation, disciplinary referrals, and anecdotal records.

Local Setting

School A

School A was a school in the Chicago Metropolitan area. A majority of the children from this community attended the public school, which was made up of two buildings. The elementary building accommodated programs for preschool at-risk children and kindergarten through fifth grade. The enrollment for the 1998-1999 school year totaled 1,502 and 1,403 of these students were in general education and 99 were in Special Education. There were between 8 and 10 sections of each grade and class sizes averaged between 24 and 27. The junior high school had more than 700 students in grades six through eight.

The student population was 96% White, 1.1% Black, 1.1% Hispanic, and 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander. The student population of low-income students was 4%, and 0.9% of the student population were Limited-English-Proficient.

The average number of years of teaching experience for teachers in the district is 9.9. Eighty-six percent of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, and 14.9% had a

master's degree or above. Fifteen percent of the teachers were male, and 84.6% were female. Ninety-nine percent of the teachers were White and 1% Hispanic.

School A utilized 71 classrooms. There were nine kindergarten classrooms, nine first grade classrooms, ten second grade classrooms, nine third grade classrooms, nine fourth grade classrooms, and nine fifth grade classrooms. There was one at-risk preschool, one supplemental instruction classroom, two communication disorder classrooms, two learning disability classrooms, two Chapter I/Reading Recovery classrooms, two speech classrooms, three gymnasiums, two music classrooms, one art classroom, a computer lab, and one cafeteria/commons.

The school curriculum consisted of reading, writing, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. There were art, music, and physical education programs as well. The school offered a wide variety of programs such as the Drug Awareness Resistance Education Program (D. A. R. E.), intramural sports, and Rainbows, a program for children from alternative family settings. Summer school was offered for children in reading from kindergarten through fourth grade.

School B

School B had a total enrollment of 620 students with a racial/ethnic background consisting of the following: 93.9% White, 0.3% Black, 4.0% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American. There were 4.2% of the school enrollment that qualified as belonging to low-income families. The criterion to be considered a low-income family were: receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or being eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The attendance rate was at 95.4%, student mobility at 5.5%, and there was no chronic truancy.

The district consisted of 245 faculty and staff, 88.6% female and 11.4% male. The total population of the staff was White. The average teaching experience was 14

years with 40.2% having a bachelor's degree and 59.8% having a master's degree and above.

School B was an elementary school for early childhood through fifth grade. There were four early childhood classrooms, three kindergartens, four first grades, four second grades, three and a half third grades, three and a half fourth grades, and four fifth grades. The average class sizes were: nine students for early childhood, 27 for kindergarten, 24 for first grade, 24 for second grade, 31.3 for third grade, 27 for fourth grade, and 27 for fifth grade. There were two cross categorical classrooms, one multi-need classroom, one REALM/Title/Chapter One room, one resource room, one gymnasium, one art room, one music room, one learning center, and two computer labs.

The students in School B were grouped heterogeneously with the exception of mathematics classes in which the students were grouped by ability. Students in special education were placed according to their individual needs. They were mainstreamed to the least restricted environment (LRE).

The school curriculum consisted of reading, writing, language arts, science, and social studies. Each week, the students had: three 30 minute sessions of physical education, two 30 minute sessions of music, one 35 minute session of art, and one 30 minute session of computer instruction. The school offered a variety of programs such as: Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE), Friendship Group, peer mediators, tutoring in the subject of reading, beginner band, student council, and summer school for grades first through fifth grade.

Community Setting

Community A

Community A was made up mostly of first-and second-generation Western Europeans of predominantly German, Irish, and Swiss heritage. The population

declined through the 1900's, but gradually began to increase thereafter. The 1960's showed rapid growth. The 1980's showed the most rapid growth in the 100-year history of the community. At the time of this research project the population registered at 12,613.

This was a very rapidly growing area. There was one public school and one parochial school that served the community. With the number of homes and the projected number of children there were plans to build a new school that would house pre-K through first grade in the plans for the year 2002. This seemed to be the only issue that faced the community.

Communities B and C

The student body of School B resided in two surrounding towns. These two communities will be referred to as Community B and Community C.

School B was one of the seven schools in an elementary district. In the district the student population was 94.3% White, 0.5% Black, 2.7% Hispanic, 2.3% Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Of the 4,758 students enrolled, 2.2% were from lower income families while 1.4% were limited-English-proficient. One hundred percent of the teachers were White. Male teachers comprised 11.4% and females accounted for 88.6% of the teaching staff. The average years of experience in the district were 14.0 years, with an average salary of $39,770.

The pupil/teacher ratio was 23:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprised 59.8% of the total faculty. The administrators had an average salary of $79,032, and the pupil/administrator ratio was 298:1.

The district was rapidly growing due to the amount of vacant land. A new elementary school was planned to open in the 1999-2000 school year to allow for expansion and low class sizes. This growth remains an issue for the expanding community.

Community B

The students that fed into school B came from a small, midwestern town located approximately 45 minutes south of a major metropolitan area. According to the town's 1997 census, the total population was 6,362 with 91.9% being White, 4.3% Black, 0.2% American Indian Eskimo, and 3.2% Asian/Pacific Islander.

The median age of the population was 27 years. The 1995 median house hold income was estimated at $53,210. The median home value was $117,391.

Community C

Community C was a small, midwestern town located approximately 43 minutes south of a major metropolitan area. According to the 1998 Census, the total population was 44,202.

The median age of the population was 33 years. The 1995 median household income was estimated at $58,834, and the median home value was $150,194.

National Context

The problem of children exhibiting inappropriate social skills was an ongoing issue that was affecting positive school interactions. Inappropriate social skills in the school environment have always existed but have become more prominent in the recent years.

There were many factors contributing to a decline in social skills. According to Elliot and Gresham (1993), these factors can be attributed to the following reasons: a lack of knowledge, insufficient practice or feedback, absence of cues or opportunities to learn or perform pro-social behaviors and the lack of reinforcement for socially skilled behavior. Socioeconomic status and a lack of parental discipline have also impacted children's social skill usage. Children who displayed these characteristics were at risk for poor academic performance and social and emotional difficulties (Parker & Asher, 1987). The time on task in the classroom was declining due to the

amount of time being spent on classroom management issues (Wentzel, 1991).

Social skills were the factors students needed to initiate and maintain positive social relationships with those around them (Mathur & Rutherford, 1996). When children did not apply these skills, their ability to initiate and maintain positive social relationships was impaired which directly affected the learning process.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Students at the elementary level exhibited poor social skills that led to inappropriate classroom behaviors: such as inappropriate manner usage, lack of cooperation, not occupying own space, putting down others, interrupting instruction, and inattentiveness.

Teacher observations, checklists, and student surveys were administered during the first two weeks of school in order to document social skills in the classroom. With the exception of the Conner's Teacher Rating Scale, all survey instruments were developed by the researchers. Teacher anecdotal records were noted throughout the length of the action research project. The students in the targeted early childhood, first grade, and fourth grade classes participated in these data collections.

Students completed a qualitative survey about their own social skills. The survey that the early childhood and first grade students completed contained four items, each with three possible answers in the form of picture symbols (Appendix A). A face with a smile indicated the students felt their skills were above average, a face with a straight line indicated that the students felt their skills were average, and a face with a frown indicated that their skills were below average. Twenty-seven students participated in the survey. Most of the students indicated their skills were above

average. A few students felt their skills were average or below average. This information is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Survey of Application of Social Skills for Early Childhood and First Grade

	Above Average	Average	Below Average
Use happy talk.	21	5	1
Keep hands and feet to self.	24	2	1
Share with others.	23	1	3
Use an inside voice.	23	2	2

The fourth grade students completed a more complex survey containing eight items (Appendix B). A majority of the students stated that they usually exhibit appropriate social skills throughout the day. Few of the students state that they seldom use appropriate social skills. See Table 2.

Table 2

Fourth Grade Student Survey on Frequency of Social Skills

	All of the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I use please and thank you.	15 (29%)	27 (53%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
I get along with others easily.	25 (49%)	21 (41%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
I share my possessions and ideas.	14 (27%)	21 (40%)	14 (27%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
I greet people after they greet me.	17 (33%)	27 (53%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
I greet people before they greet me.	7 (14%)	18 (36%)	18 (36%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)
I take responsibility for my actions.	27 (53%)	15 (29%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)

Teacher observations (Appendix C) were made the third and fourth weeks of school for 30 minutes, three times each week. On the average, five students did not occupy their own space, five were inattentive, two put down others, nine interrupted others, three were uncooperative, and three used inappropriate manners. Refer to Figure 1.

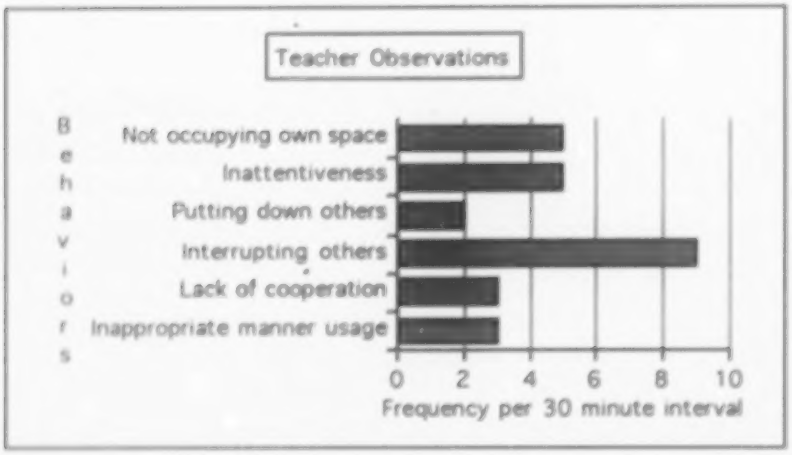

Figure 1. Teacher observations on frequency of targeted social behaviors.

The Connor's Teacher Rating Scale (Appendix D) was administered to 24 randomly selected students. The areas of concentration included conduct problems and daydreaming or attention problems. Students who fell within the normal range in the area of conduct problems included 87.5% of the targeted students, and 12.5% of the students were within the area of concern range. Students who were within the average range in the area of daydream-attention problems included 20.8% of the targeted students and 79.2% of the students fell within the area of concern range. See Figure 2 and Figure 3.

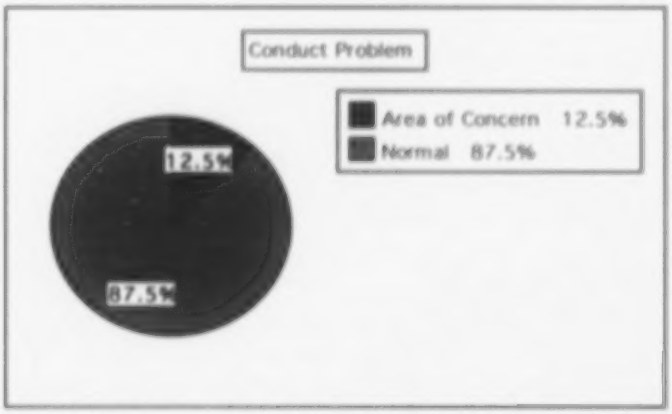

Figure 2. Comparison of students with a conduct problem based on the Connor's Teacher Rating Scale.

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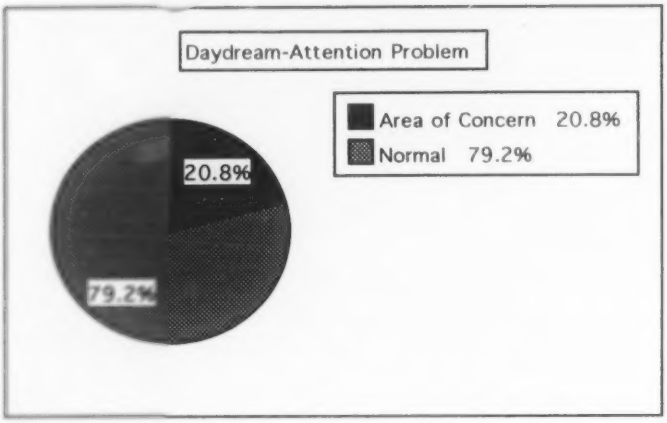

Figure 3. Comparison of students with a daydream-attention problem based on the Connor's Teacher Rating Scale.

Probable Causes

Site Based

A lack of positive social skills is apparent in the four targeted classrooms. Factors which contribute to the poor social skills include inappropriate role models, the negative influence of the media, and the lack of parental supervision.

Inappropriate role models are evident in students' lives. Students learn social skills through imitating adults' social behaviors. There are adult family members who are lacking positive social skills which can be reflected in students' behaviors. Students are also idolizing professional athletes and artists who exhibit violent behaviors. Society tends to focus on the behaviors while deemphasizing the consequences of their actions. Students are aware that some celebrities are not being penalized and in turn, feel that they can imitate the same actions without a consequence.

The media has a negative influence on many of the students in today's society. Compared to ten years ago, the types of television shows have greatly changed. Children are now faced with violent public television as well as cablevision. Wrestling

is one of the popular television shows among students. The children admire wrestlers and think it is appropriate to use wrestling moves on their peers. Current trends are responsible for parents to act violently to obtain a specific and popular toy for their child. These actions are partially a result of the media embellishing the toys so that children have to obtain them to fit in with their peers. The negative scenarios in which violence and ruthlessness are evident give children a misconception of how to obtain a desirable item. If parents would spend more time and monitor what the children are viewing, there would be less violence in the classroom.

In the 1990's, the trend was to have both parents working. While the parents were working, who was watching the children? In some households the children go to a daycare, had a babysitter, or stayed at home by themselves. There are four classes that participated in the research project and over 30% of the students are supervised by a babysitter or left home alone. While the parents are at work, the children are more susceptible to peer pressure and surrounded by negative influences of the media. With more households having had both parents or single parents working, children are not exposed to positive social skills that parents should have been providing. The children's role models are changing from their parents to their peers and celebrities on television which may not provide proper social skills.

Literature Based

Researchers suggest several underlying causes for a lack of social skills. A lack of knowledge, poor self concept, and a lack of parental discipline are among the probable causes.

A primary source for a lack of social skills among students is that the students simply are not equipped with the knowledge to act in socially appropriate ways (Elliot & Gresham, 1993). Students who struggle with reading have difficulty teaching themselves to read. Social skills are just the same: students who came to the

classroom with limited understanding of social skills could not be expected to demonstrate them or acquire them on their own (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). In many instances, children simply come to school without the requisite skills (Maag & Webber, 1995). Appropriate social skills are not innate, nor are they automatically developed in people (Lickona, 1996). These skills must be developed through learning and practice (Benninga & Wynne, 1998).

A poor self-concept is another factor which leads children to follow through with inappropriate social behavior (Mathur & Rutherford, 1996). A lack of social skills impedes a child's ability to work successfully in cooperative groups or in peer interacting activities. As a result of this failure, a child's self-concept begins to erode (Maag & Webber, 1995). In a highly challenging social environment, many children are beginning to feel hopeless, helpless, and powerless. These feelings lead to a lack of trust, interest in helping others, and other positive social behaviors (Berreth & Berman, 1997). Children simply are beginning to not believe that their own success in social situations was possible. In turn, they never initiate socially appropriate behavior (Maag & Webber, 1995).

An influence in a child's life is parent modeling. Therefore, appropriate social behavior by parents would only increase the child's chances of carrying on the same actions. For children, everyday experiences with their parents are fundamental in developing social skills (Mize & Bell, 1996). According to Mize and Bell (1996), nurturance and responsiveness are key factors in developing the social competence of children. These factors result in the children seeing the world in a positive light and, in turn, these children expect relationships to be rewarding.

However, children also observe the contradictions in actions of adults, especially parents (Berreth & Berman, 1997). Developing appropriate social behaviors in children, especially adolescents, becomes increasingly more difficult

when the skills are not being appropriately modeled. Children have limited models of appropriate behavior (Smith, 1995). Children everywhere are being challenged to make decisions that require appropriate social judgments and select the correct moral responses that parents may not have instilled in them (Tyree, Vance & McJunkin, 1997). This makes it difficult for children to display the appropriate social skill in a certain situation.

Another factor in parental influence is the time parents spend with their children. On average, individual contact time between parent and child is fifteen minutes a day (Bellanca, 1992). Becoming a socially responsible individual requires many skills; skills that have increased more and more as times have changed. The problem is that the support system that provides these skills in the past, the family, has diminished (Bellanca, 1992). Departure of adults from kids' lives has significantly decreased. According to some reports, over the past 30 years, there has been a 50 percent decrease in the amount of time parents are spending with kids (Garbarino, 1997). This lack of adult supervision adds to the effects of other negative social influences (Garbarino, 1997).

A lack of social skills has become an increased problem in the school setting. Some contributing factors to this phenomena are: a lack of knowledge, poor self concept, and a lack of parental discipline.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Appropriate social skill usage among children was declining in today's society. The lack of social skills affected children in various areas, such as family and peer interactions and society. It also affected the learning process in the school environment when teachers spent more time dealing with improper behaviors than focusing on academics.

What are social skills and why are they important? Social skills are defined as socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in a way that elicits positive responses and assists in avoiding negative responses (Elliot & Gresham, 1993). These are skills that are learned and then reinforced both at home and school through positive and negative interactions with others.

Children need to be able to decide when and what skill need to be used. There are usually different sets of rules for home and at school. A child needs to realize which skills are appropriate for both settings. Children need to have a means to understand what they are expected to do in each situation.

Another definition of social skills is that they are specific, identifiable, discrete, learned behaviors that produce positive social consequences in social situations (Warger & Rutherford, 1993). Children need to observe and follow the positive social skills. There are stages that children go through when learning social skills. The first

stage is the "hook." It is at this stage that the groundwork is laid. Encouragement is important to the development of these skills. Social skills can first be taught by way of a T-chart or a web. As a result, specific behaviors may be generated. A child may be able to distinguish between acceptable and the non-acceptable behaviors. Students can then practice the skills through guided skill practice. After they have practiced, self-evaluation is necessary. For example, if the targeted skill is listening, the children will switch roles to get comfortable and see the problem from both perspectives. "Observing" then takes place. As the children practice a targeted behavior, a checklist can be kept. Samples of the work can be kept. Practicing the skill until the skill is automatic is the goal. The last and most important step is the reward. Rewards should be given as a class or group (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1992).

Most educators recognize that the days of defining public education's goal as only teaching basic academics are over. During the last decade, teachers have realized that students need to be taught desirable behaviors in the same planned way that academics were taught. The reasons students do not learn acceptable social skills are many, including a lack of knowledge, insufficient practice, insufficient reinforcement and emotional responses that inhibit skill use (Cox & Gunn, 1980). Whatever the reason for a lack of skills, the school must establish and implement procedures to teach these skills.

When going through the stages for positive behavior, the child receives positive reinforcement consistently. One important reason for using positive reinforcement is to strengthen nonaggressive behaviors to the point that it replaces the aggressive behaviors. As long as children are taught skills at an early age, these skills become automatic and natural (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997).

Children who possess appropriate social skills are more likely to achieve academic and social success. According to Agostin and Bain (1997), having

appropriate social skills is one component in predicting academic success in the classroom. Teachers who spend less time attending to disruptive behaviors have more time to focus on teaching academics. Children then have more time to engage in cooperative learning activities to enhance positive peer interactions. Children who exhibit aversive behaviors, such as constant interrupting, name-calling, and insubordination, make it difficult for the students to attain the fundamental academic skills (Quinn, Jannasch-Pennell, & Rutherford, 1995). The more time a student displays these behaviors, the further behind the students fall in their studies. Furthermore, Mather and Rutherford (1996) state that without basic social skills, students miss out on vital academics and are denied positive learning experiences with their peers.

One goal of teaching social skills in the classroom is to improve a child's self-concept. One of the many motivating factors for students are social goals. Social goals are important to building self-esteem in children (Winograd & Gaskins, 1992). A fully developed foundation of social skills ensures positive self-esteem in later years (Bellanca, 1992). According to Kohn (1991), a well-designed program of prosocial instruction often correlates with healthy self-esteem. Teaching social skills to children helps them develop self-esteem (Burke, 1992).

A lack of social skills has a long term effect on a child's life. In the extreme cases, it leads to numerous offenses with the law. Mathur and Rutherford (1994) stated that adolescence with negative social skills contribute to repeated contacts with law enforcement, the courts, and juvenile corrections. Students who possess poor social skills may not complete high school. According to McCafferty (1990), a characteristic of students who drop out of school early are low achieving students who are not accepted by their peers and are cognizant of their low social status. Besides not completing high school, poor social skills has a negative effect on their career.

Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) stated that 90% of persons who lose their job do so as a result of social problems. Having developed proper social skills, a child can become a productive participant in society.

There are many strategies to enhance a child's social skills in the classroom and generalize into the community. In order for students to possess proper social skills, they need to be immersed in a surrounding full of positive social skills which are modeled in everyday situations. Positive social behaviors should be modeled by teachers since children learn by imitating others (Lawhon, 1997). As important as it is to model appropriate social behaviors, the teacher also needs to provide corrective feedback to elicit appropriate social responses (Elliott & Gresham, 1993). Through this instructional strategy, students are able to transfer the skills learned through modeling and apply them into the community.

Role playing is another strategy in which teachers have the ability to create a structured setting in a controlled environment. Students are more willing to learn appropriate social skills during role-playing when it relates to situations students may encounter (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Using role-playing, teachers target specific social skills that pertain to the students. In order for students to practice proper social skills, they need to know the expectations for the targeted skills (Brooks & Kann, 1993). Role-playing allows teachers to create successful situations to attain positive social skills.

Cooperative learning is the final technique to emphasize positive social skills, allowing the students to incorporate the previously learned strategies and apply them in a structured group setting. Cooperative learning is a strategy to teach interactive social skills (Fogarty & Bellanca, 1992). Cooperative learning provides students an opportunity to be responsible for using social skills in a group setting to accomplish a common goal. Not only do students learn from one another in cooperative groups, but

they are also promoting prosocial behaviors (Kohn, 1991). Cooperative learning provides academic and social growth.

Project Objectives and Outcomes

As a result of increased direct instruction of appropriate social skills during the period of September 1999 through January 2000, the targeted students will increase their ability to use positive social skills in the classroom as measured by teacher observations, checklists, and student surveys.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes were necessary:

1. Teach targeted social skills.
2. Reinforce target social skills through the curriculum.
3. Design role-playing activities.

As a result of implementing cooperative learning strategies during the period of September 1999 through January 2000, the targeted students will increase their development of interpersonal skills in the classroom as measured by teacher observations, checklists, and student surveys.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Develop lesson plans that promote cooperative learning.
2. Teach cooperative learning skills through direct instruction.
3. Organize class into cooperative learning groups.

Action Plan

The action plan was organized to address the major components of the project. The outline was organized into teaching the six social skills, one every two weeks. The remaining weeks were used to emphasize or reteach social skills, as well as reinforce the taught skills. The targeted social skills included: interrupting instruction,

inappropriate manner usage, put-downs, inattentiveness, not occupying own space, and a lack of cooperation. The action plan was implemented two hours per week through the months of September to December.

The lessons were presented in outline form chronologically. They overlapped and were used at various times throughout the project and were adjusted or modified as they were being implemented. The early childhood and first grade classrooms had some different activities than the fourth grade classrooms due to the developmental age of the students.

Action Plan

I. Targeted social skill: Interrupting instruction
   - A. Role-play activity in which one student is in the middle of two other students while they are talking about two different topics.
   - B. Tallying interrupting instruction
     1. Early childhood and first grade: students put a tally in a bear's tummy
     2. Fourth grades: students keep track of own interruption on desk
   - C. The poem "Elmore Interrupts Us"

II. Targeted social skill: Inappropriate manner usage (saying please, thank you and excuse me)
   - A. "Look who's been caught having good manners" jar
   - B. Role-playing
   - C. T-Chart for appropriate manner usage

III. Targeted social skill: Put-downs
   - A. Brainstorm feelings when a person uses a put-down
   - B. Make a "Happy talk" chart that students can substitute instead of a put-down

C. Cause and effect chart

D. T-chart

IV. Targeted social skill: Inattentiveness

A. Two and three-step directions

B. Play the game "Simon Says"

C. Paying attention to the task

D. Coloring sheet with following directions activity

V. Targeted social skill: Not occupying own space

A. Role playing

B. Teach "Give me five" (Eyes watching, ear listening, hands still, brain thinking, and heart caring)

C. Class discussions

VI. Targeted social skill: Lack of cooperation

A. Roll a story

B. Establish cooperative base groups

1. Teacher made
2. Heterogeneous
3. Gender mixed
4. 3-4 students per group
5. Apply social skills previously learned in a curricular lesson

VII. Reinforcement of all social skills taught (Teacher-judged)

A. Reinforce and monitor on-going activities

B. Additional activities will be taught as needed

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the success of the program, a variety of assessments were used as post-data. It consisted of a teacher observation checklist, the Conner's

Teacher Rating Scale, and student surveys. The teacher observation checklist covering the six targeted behaviors was completed three times over a 30 minute period. The targeted behaviors included: inappropriate manner usage, lack of cooperation, not occupying own space, putting down others, interrupting instruction, and inattentiveness. The Conner's Teacher Rating Scale in the areas of conduct problems and daydream/attention problems was administered to the same 24 students. Student surveys were also collected from the 78 students.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve the social skills of children through a variety of activities and teaching techniques. The social skills of the studied children were measured through behavior checklists, teacher observations, and anecdotal records. The implementation of cooperative learning strategies and direct social skill instruction was selected to produce the desired outcomes.

Direct instruction was a technique used to teach the targeted social sills. Teacher modeling and role-playing were used during direct instruction to enhance the awareness of the importance of positive social skills. The students also listened to and read stories and poems that dealt with the specific social skills being taught. T-charts, problem-solving activities, and listening games were also used to build and reinforce certain concepts.

Cooperative learning strategies were also applied to enhance the development and use of positive social skills. Lessons were taught in the content areas using cooperative groups. Teacher-made groups of three or four students were incorporated for specific content lessons. In these groups, the children practiced and developed the social skills that had been taught to them previously. New social skills were also introduced at this time.

The implementation of these interventions was broken down into equal time

frames for each skill. For each skill being taught there was a two week interval. The first week for each skill was a time for introduction, modeling, discussion, practice, and reinforcement. Depending on the skill being taught, either two or three half-hour periods were set aside for the first week. During these periods the skill would be introduced and taught. Specific activities that were designed for each skill would be performed and practiced. During the second week, the skill would once again be practiced and reinforced through modeling. Also during this week, the researchers monitored the progress of the students through observations and anecdotal records. For certain skills, the children also kept track of their own progress with tally sheets.

The targeted skill during the first two week period was interrupting instruction. Role-playing was a major technique in demonstrating and teaching this skill. The demonstration used was the "Too Many Talkers" presentation. To do this, three volunteers acted out a scene. One child was in the middle and the child on the right began talking to the child in the middle. Shortly after, the child on the left also began talking to the child in the middle. When finished, the child in the middle was required to relay as much detail from the conversations as possible to the rest of the class. This was done several times so that many children had an opportunity to play different roles. Group discussion then followed on abilities of the people to listen when interruptions frequently occur. To further enhance the awareness of this skill, the poem "Elmore Interrupts Us" was read. Discussions were also prompted by this reading.

During these two weeks the students were asked to keep a tally of the times that they interrupted instruction or other conversations. The early childhood students and first graders kept tallies on the picture of a bear. Fourth and fifth graders kept track on a sheet taped to their desks. This technique helped raise their awareness to what it was that they were or were not doing in terms of interruption.

During weeks three and four, the skill on which we concentrated was inappropriate manner usage (saying please, thank you, and excuse me). Again, to strengthen this skill a variety of role playing situations was used. An incentive technique was also introduced for this skill. The researchers used a "Good Manners" jar in which marbles were placed each time a student was "caught" displaying good manners. To enhance the students' awareness appropriate manners, each teacher created a T-chart with the students.

The focus of the fifth and sixth weeks became put-downs. A variety of techniques was used in order to decrease the frequency in which put-downs occurred. Once again, a T-chart was used. The T-chart was used to elicit the feelings that are experienced by the person giving the put-down as well as the person receiving the put-down. A cause and effect chart was also employed. The children were given the opportunity to see that what they say can strongly effect the thoughts and feelings of others. Finally, the students brainstormed "happy talk" ideas. These are things that can be said to one another instead of the put-downs.

During weeks seven and eight, the intervention targeted inattentiveness. For this skill, the development was attempted through several activities based on following directions. The early childhood and first grade classes were given coloring sheets for which they had to follow two and three step directions which were given orally. The fourth and fifth graders also participated in activities in which multiple directions were given. For example, before starting an assignment, the children were given multiple directions that had to be followed. The children were also given multi-step directions that needed to be completed before doing simple tasks such as lining up or taking out supplies. Another method used to build attentiveness was the game "Simple Simon." This game was played at various times by each class during the intervention. Finally, an activity called "Paying Attention to the Task" was used.

Occupying one's own space was now the goal for the weeks of nine and ten. Role playing was the technique most used for demonstrating and teaching this social skill. The researchers also taught their students a system called "Give Me Five." When a researcher spoke these words, the children knew to have their eyes watching, ears listening, hands still, brain thinking, and heart caring. Class discussions were also a part of teaching this social skill. These discussions were to help students recognize the needs for occupying one's own space such as safety and others' comfort in the classroom. These discussions were also used to show students that they were responsible for their own actions and that they had to accept the appropriate consequences that came with them.

During weeks eleven and twelve, lack of cooperation was the target area on which the researchers focused. In order to teach the skill of cooperation, the researchers used the activity "Roll a Story." Students were put into groups. As a group, the students were then to develop and write a story based on certain parameters that they, as a group, came up with. Cooperative base groups were set up by the researchers. Each group had three to four students and were heterogeneous. While in these cooperative groups, curricular lessons were taught. The children were to apply their cooperation skills, as well as all of the social skills previously learned in the intervention.

For the final week of the intervention, the researchers reinforced all social skills that were taught. The skills were monitored during on-going activities.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of direct instruction and cooperative learning on student social skills, a teacher observation tally based on six targeted social skills was conducted. The two week tallying occurred for six half-hour sessions prior to the implementation of teaching social skills and then for three half-hour sessions at the

culmination of the project. These figures were calculated by the pre and post data and are presented in Figure 4.

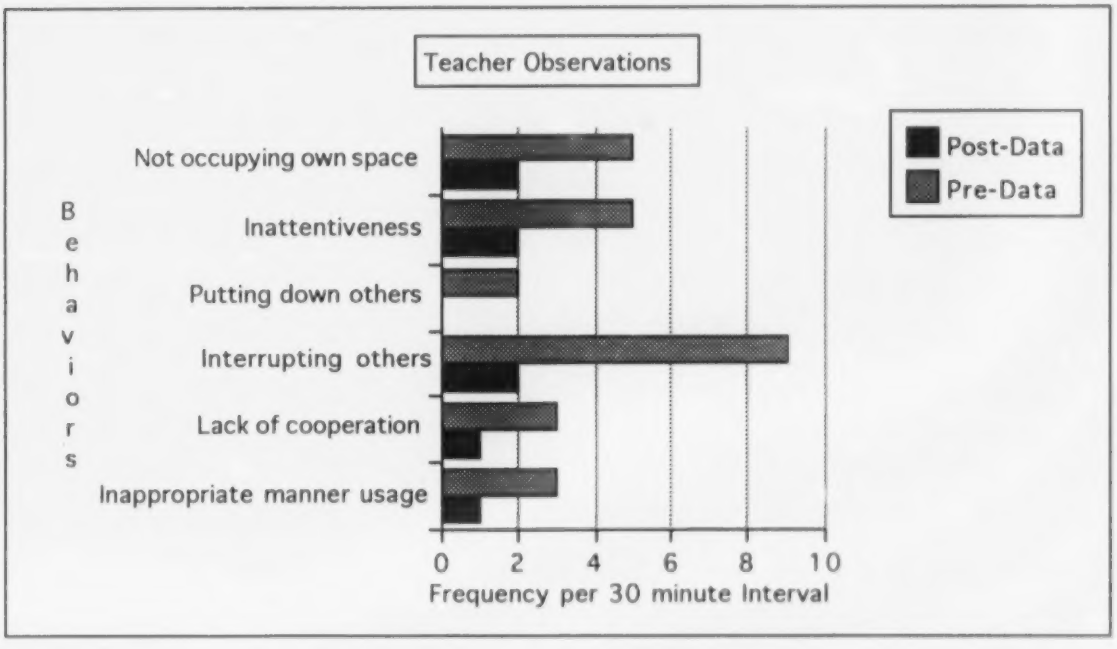

Figure 4. Pre and post data of teacher observations of students' usage of inappropriate behaviors.

There was a noticeable decrease in interrupting others, from an average of 9 occurrences per session to an average of 2 occurrences per session. The remaining behaviors also showed at least a 50% decrease at the conclusion of the intervention.

Twenty-four randomly selected students were administered the Connor's Teacher Rating Scale prior to and at the completion of the intervention. The focus areas were conduct problem and daydream-attention problem and are displayed in Figure 5.

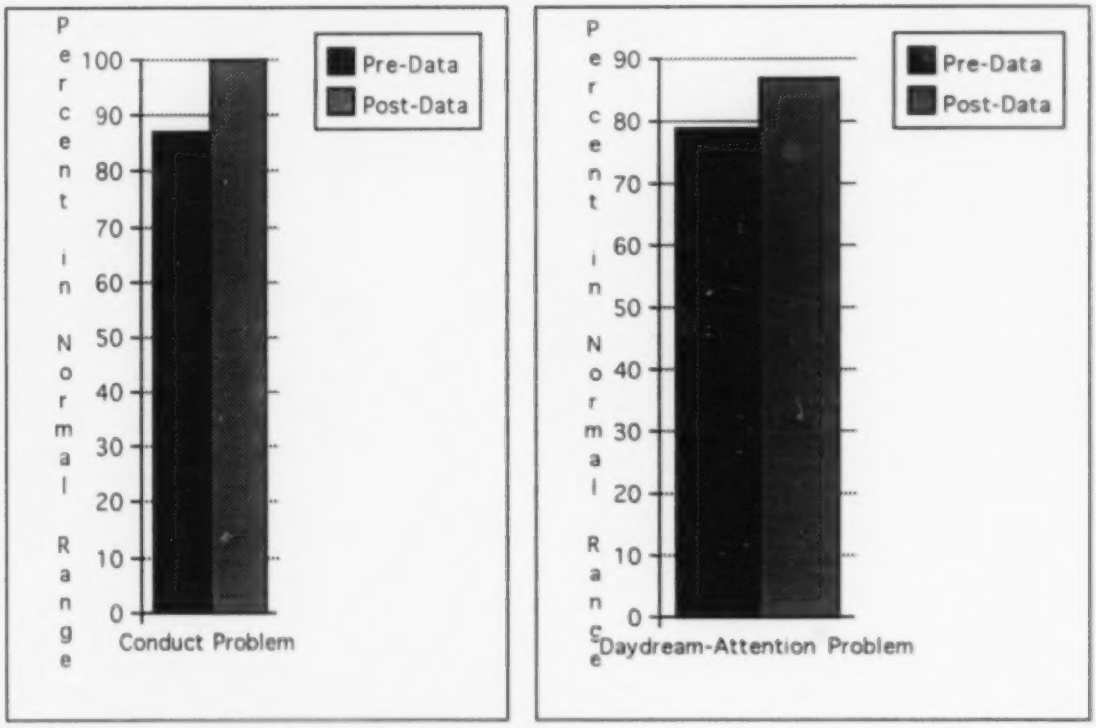

Figure 5. Pre and post data for the Connor's Teacher Rating Scale of Students in the areas of conduct problem and daydream-attention problem.

According to the data, there was an increase in students falling within the normal range in both areas. All of the twenty-four randomly selected students in the area of conduct problem fell within the normal range at the conclusion of the intervention. There was a slight increase in students falling within the normal range in the area of daydream-attention problem.

The fourth grade students were given a survey to complete prior to and at the end of the interventions. The students indicated how often they exhibited the selected social skills by choosing one of the following options: all of the time, most of the time, sometimes, rarely, and never. The researchers chose to present the pre-data and the post-data by combining the options of all of the time and most of the time in one

category and rarely and never in another category. These results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Fourth Grade Student Survey on Frequency of Social Skills

	All / Most of the time		Rarely / Never	
	Pre-Data	Post-Data	Pre-Data	Post-Data
I use please and thank you.	42 (82%)	41 (82%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
I get along with others easily.	46 (90%)	43 (86%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)
I share my possessions and ideas.	35 (67%)	28 (56%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)
I greet people after they greet me.	44 (86%)	35 (70%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
I greet people before they greet me.	25 (50%)	19 (38%)	7 (14%)	6 (12%)
I take responsibility for my actions.	42 (82%)	40 (80%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)

According to the post-data, there was a slight decrease in the students responding that they used appropriate social skills all or most of the time.

The early childhood and first grade students provided feedback on a survey containing four social skills. The surveys were given before and after intervention. The data in Table 4 display the students' responses in the form of above average or below average.

Table 4

Student Survey of Appropriate Social Skills for Early Childhood and First Grade

	Above Average		Below Average	
	Pre-Data	Post-Data	Pre-Data	Post-Data
Use happy talk.	21	25	1	1
Keep hands and feet to self.	24	27	1	0
Share with others.	23	24	3	0
Use an inside voice.	23	24	2	1

There was an increase in student perception of demonstrating appropriate social skills.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the review and presentation of the data, the students demonstrated an improvement in prosocial skills. Cooperative learning and direct instruction appear to have had a positive effect on student behavior. Through role-playing, modeling, literature, and problem-solving activities, the children appeared to be able to build and transfer these skills.

The intervention of direct instruction plans, and cooperative learning appeared to produce the desired changes in behavior. Therefore, the researchers would recommend the use of this intervention with slight alterations.

If possible, it is the recommendation of the researchers that observation checklists be completed by someone other than the classroom teacher. Interruption of instruction was too frequent during data collection. The use of an independent observer would ensure more accurate data as well as provide more consistency to the data collection.

Another recommendation of the researchers would be to be very flexible with

time. Setting aside time to teach the social skills lessons was extremely difficult and problems were encountered. The researchers suggest incorporating the activities into the established curriculum. For example, many of the role-playing activities may be carried out through social studies lessons, and much of the literature used during the intervention may be turned into reading lessons as well.

The researchers found that the individual student-conducted checklists were a beneficial tool in increasing student awareness. Although official data was not taken, the self-checking done by students seemed to make them more aware of the actions that they were taking. Keeping track of their own mistakes made the children more conscious of the actions that they should be taking.

In conclusion, the researchers noted an improvement in the students' usage of appropriate social skills. With consistent use of cooperative learning strategies and direct instruction, the students broadened their self-awareness of using prosocial behaviors in the classroom environment. The researchers will continue to use cooperative learning and direct instruction to further enhance students' ability to display prosocial behaviors.

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Appendix A
Early Childhood and First Grade Student Survey

How Did I Do Today?

Name_____

1. Uses Happy Talk.

2. Keeps Hands and Feet To Self.

3. Shares with others.

4. Uses an inside voice.

Appendix B
Fourth Grade Student Survey

Student Survey

Answer the following questions as best as you can!
Circle your answer.

1. I interrupt when others are speaking.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

2. I use please and thank you.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

3. I get along with others easily.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

4. I share my possessions and ideas.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

5. I greet people after they greet me.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

6. I greet people before they greet me.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

7. I take responsibility for my actions.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

8. I do things without thinking.
all of the time most of the time sometimes rarely never

Appendix C
Connor's Teacher Rating Scale

Child Name:_____ **Child Age:**____ **Child Sex:**_____ **Teacher:**_____

Instructions: Read each item below carefully, and decide how much you think the child has been bothered by this problem during the past month.

Not at All	Just a Little	Pretty Much	Very Much	CTRS-39
				CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR
0	1	2	3	1. Constantly fidgeting
0	1	2	3	2. Hums and makes other odd noises
0	1	2	3	3. Demands must be met immediately - easily frustrated
0	1	2	3	4. Coordination poor
0	1	2	3	5. Restless or overactive
0	1	2	3	6. Excitable, impulsive
0	1	2	3	7. Inattentive, easily distracted
0	1	2	3	8. Fails to finish things s/he starts - short attention span
0	1	2	3	9. Overly sensitive
0	1	2	3	10. Overly serious or sad
0	1	2	3	11. Daydreams
0	1	2	3	12. Sullen or sulky
0	1	2	3	13. Cries often and easily
0	1	2	3	14. Disturbs other children
0	1	2	3	15. Quarrelsome
0	1	2	3	16. Mood changes quickly and drastically
0	1	2	3	17. Acts 'smart'
0	1	2	3	18. Destructive
0	1	2	3	19. Steals
0	1	2	3	20. Lies
0	1	2	3	21. Temper outbursts, explosive and unpredictable behavior
				GROUP PARTICIPATION
0	1	2	3	22. Isolates him/herself from other children
0	1	2	3	23. Appears to be unaccepted by group
0	1	2	3	24. Appears to be easily led
0	1	2	3	25. No sense of fair play
0	1	2	3	26. Appears to lack leadership
0	1	2	3	27. Does not get along with opposite sex
0	1	2	3	28. Does not get along with same sex
0	1	2	3	29. Teases other children or interferes with their activities
				ATTITUDE TOWARD AUTHORITY
0	1	2	3	30. Submissive
0	1	2	3	31. Defiant
0	1	2	3	32. Impudent
0	1	2	3	33. Shy
0	1	2	3	34. Fearful
0	1	2	3	35. Excessive demands for teacher's attention
0	1	2	3	36. Stubborn
0	1	2	3	37. Overly anxious to please
0	1	2	3	38. Uncooperative
0	1	2	3	39. Attendance problem
Not at All	Just a Little	Pretty Much	Very Much	

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Appendix D
Teacher Observation Checklist

Date:

Inappropriate manner usage	Lack of cooperation
Not occupying own space	Putting down others
Interrupting others	Inattentiveness